

# Categorization of Modern Satanism—An Analysis of LaVey's Early Writings

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## Abstract

Researchers have classified Anton LaVey's so-called “modern Satanism” as a self-spirituality (as defined by Paul Heelas) New Age group, and as a Human Potential Movement group. This paper analyzes LaVey's view of human nature and the human ego in his early works with respect to these classifications by identifying similarities and differences between the characteristics of these classifications and the early writings of LaVey. The analysis concludes that it is reasonable to categorize LaVey's Satanism as both a self-spirituality New Age group and as a Human Potential Movement group; however, this paper proposes that LaVey's modern Satanism is more accurately described as a member of the “prosperity wing” sub-classification of self-spirituality New Age.

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## 1. Introduction

The very name “Satanism” makes it a controversial topic in Christian cultures. It is therefore not surprising that Satanism has sparked numerous gloomy imaginations and has been a darling subject in both Christian gospel literature, anti-cult movements, and popular culture. However, in spite of this interest sociologists have only recently begun to take Satanism seriously.

The so-called “modern Satanism,” i.e., the form of Satanism that was founded by Anton LaVey in the 1960ies in the US, and which is generally accepted as the first genuine, organized Satanism, has earlier been classified as a new religious movement in the same category as modern occultism or neopaganism. More recent research has augmented or replaced this categorization with Paul Heelas' term “self-spirituality,” which refers to the kind of spirituality found in New Age (NA) movements or within part of the Human Potential Movement (HPM). However, modern Satanism is a rather new field of sociological interest, and although LaVey's writings still occupy a key role within the movement, only few in-depth text analyses have been made, and virtually no further discussions have been made in terms of the categorization of modern Satanism.

This paper summarizes my analysis of LaVey's writing with respect to self-spirituality and HPM, with particular focus on his concept of the human nature and self. This focus was chosen in part because humans occupy a key role both in terms of modern Satanism, HPM, and self-spirituality, and because I expected that this approach would illuminate both similarities and differences between modern Satanism and generic self-spirituality and HPM. This paper thus attempts to answer the question: “How does Anton LaVey describe human nature; and how does this description harmonize with general tendencies within the Human Potential Movement and Heelas' term, self-spirituality?”

This paper is organized as follows: firstly, research in modern Satanism is briefly summarized and earlier categorizations are outlined. This historic information is followed by an introduction to humanistic psychology, HPM, and self-spirituality. The analysis, which is the main focus of this paper, is introduced with a description of the primary sources, and LaVey's view of humans is described and compared with NA and HPM. The paper concludes with a recategorization proposal and arguments supporting this proposal.

## 2. Research in Modern Satanism

Research in modern Satanism has accelerated only within the last decade. In the 1970es a few anthropological studies were performed (Moody 1974, Alfred 1976), but otherwise Satanism has mostly been described by Satanists themselves, journalists, and Christian counter-cult movements. In the 1980es, Satanism became interesting to sociologists and folklorists as a result of the so-called “Satanic Panic,” a moral panic that focused on the supposed existence of a subversive, Satanic conspiracy. The public fear of Satanists, the ensuing lawsuits, and the vast amount of literature published by counter-cult and anti-cult movements triggered a fair amount of academic papers and books on Satanism as Christian demonology, urban legend, rumor panic, ostensive acting among teen-agers, media discourse, etc. Academic interest lay on the use of Satanism as a myth, and with few exceptions existing Satanism was only mentioned in order to reject alleged connections between existing Satanism and myth. Even so, the mention was so cursory that in a review of perhaps the most important book on Satanism in that period, *The Satanism Scare* (Bromley 1991), British sociologist Graham Harvey felt compelled to ask whether Satanists really existed (Harvey 1995). Descriptions of modern Satanism were usually limited to brief summaries of LaVey's books, uncritically supplemented with information from LaVey's partially fabricated biographies.

This lack of contemporary sources and sociological data is not necessarily indicative of superficiality or lacking interest, but may be explained otherwise: in 1975, modern Satanism had become a splintered and disorganized movement, and from the mid-1970es until the mid-1990es, Satanism seemed to exist in such relative obscurity that Gordon Melton almost declared it extinct (Melton 1997, 608). This

picture changed in the mid-1990s when Satanism began to appear on the Internet where it became easier for Satanists to share material, communicate, and network (Petersen 2002). This flourishing probably explains a renewed interest among sociologists, including papers and books by US sociologist James R. Lewis and Ph. D. studies in Sweden and Norway (Mathisen 2008). The new studies have mostly been of sociological interest and have mainly focused on minor, local groups and interaction on the Internet, and to a lesser degree on the textual sources of modern Satanism.

The explanation of the lacking academic interest in modern Satanism is thus presumably a combination of two things: the small number of Satanists, and the fact that Satanism was a rather decentralized movement. In 1971, in the early years of the Church of Satan, the membership count was estimated at 400 to 500 individuals, and in 1968-1969 while the organization still conducted group rituals, only about 50 to 60 individuals regularly attended the rituals (Alfred 2008, 490f). Observing Satanism in its current, decentralized form, and ignoring those teen-agers that appear to be using Satanism as a part of a youth rebellion, Graham Harvey assessed the number of Satanists in England in 1995 to be fewer than 100 (Harvey 1995), and sociologist Jesper Aagaard Petersen conjectured the number of Danish Satanists to be no more than a few hundred individuals in 2002 (Batchelor 2002), which is presumably still the case. The Church of Satan originally had a centralized structure, membership, and organization, similar to those found in contemporary new religious groups. However, after LaVey had ceased to conduct group rituals, workshops, and other activities in his own house in 1972 and the system of local groups ("grottos") had been abandoned in 1975, the group became highly decentralized and became organized as an "audience cult," as it is termed in the NA movement (Aldridge 2002, 207), using the Internet as its primary medium for contact and information exchange (Lewis 2001, Lap 2002). Appendix 1 provides a bibliography of the most important research literature in modern Satanism.

### 3. Categorization of Modern Satanism

Categorizations of modern Satanism have been strongly influenced by popular culture and theological imaginations, usually resulting in Satanism being described in terms of medieval concepts of witches' Sabbaths and demon worship, or in terms of theological notions about Satanism as inverse Christianity. This tendency is exemplified in *Opslagsbog i Religion/Livsanskuelse* (a Danish handbook of religions) from 1983:

***Satanism**, Satan cult: worship of forces of evil, with °occult ceremonies, the so-called °black masses. S involves a blasphemous attitude towards anything sacred, in particular the Christian worship of evil: the "Lord's Supper" is celebrated by drinking sacrificial blood, the mass is read from behind, the "Apostle's Creed" uses the name of the °Antichrist. These practices may be combined with elements from traditional °fertility cults, °witchcraft, black °magic, and sex cults. S has primarily been mentioned in the US (e.g., the Manson sect) and England, e.g., as °exorcism and as part of °new religious movements.*

Most of this explanation, which appears to be an attempt to unite medieval, theological concepts with the study of new religious movements, has been rejected by sociologists that have studied modern Satanism. They have instead described Satanism as a new religious movement, such as in the book: *Nye religiøse bevægelser i Danmark* [i.e., *New Religious Movements in Denmark*] (Pade 1999), and in several of Gordon Melton's papers, including *Modern Alternative Religions in the West*. In this paper, Melton includes Satanism in "The Magical Family" together with Crowley-inspired occultism and modern witchcraft (Melton 1997, 608). This categorization is somewhat problematic, however, because Satanism became strongly decentralized and thus lost much of its structural similarity with other new religious movements as early as 1975. Olav Hammer, on the other hand, classifies Satanism as part of NA, but Hammer seems to be rather uninformed about modern Satanism: for example, in the few lines he spends on his description of Satanism, Hammer writes about the Temple of Set that they: "worship a being that is called the Prince of Darkness," which is somewhat misleading at best (Hammer 1997, 112f). Departing from these earlier classifications, today researchers seem to have reached an agreement that modern Satanism should be categorized as HPM and/or self-spirituality (Petersen

2005, Dyrendal 2007, La Fontaine 1999), but few researchers clarify this categorization. The next section provides a brief introduction to these terms, beginning with an outline of humanistic psychology, which served as a foundation for both HPM and NA.

#### **4. Humanistic Psychology and the Human Potential Movement**

Humanistic psychology was originally an objection against the industrialization, urbanization, materialism, and environmental destruction of the 1950s and 1960s. It was also intended as an alternative to the behavioristic and psychoanalytical fields of psychology which humanistic psychologists thought objectified humans or focused only on our illnesses. The new approach of humanistic psychology was to focus on the “healthy” human being, humans as conscious actors, and human strengths and abilities and options for life-long development.

Abraham Maslow, who represented the movement together with colleagues such as Carl Rogers, Rolly May, and others, believed that every person possesses a huge potential and a natural desire to become self-actualized. The reason why the prosperous Western society sported only about 10% self-actualized people according to Maslow, was undesirable influence and upbringing, for example when a child experienced a conflict between its own feelings and the expectations of its surroundings. If an individual managed to deliberate himself or herself from undesirable external influences, then not only would this individual be able to realize his or her hidden potential, the person would also reach his or her “authentic self.” This authentic self was considered naturally “good” and able to instinctively act properly and responsibly to the advantage of itself and its surroundings (Schultz 2004:461ff).

Humanistic psychology has been accused of promoting narcissism without social responsibility. This conflicts with the self-understanding of humanistic psychology, however, as it describes insight, love to oneself, and love of others as inseparable and mutually reinforcing (Puttick 2000, 205).

The term “The Human Potential Movement” has been used as an umbrella description for a large array of groups, activities, people, and techniques that are found in the tension between spirituality and psychology, and which have a particular focus on furthering the physical, emotional, mental, creative, or spiritual potential that each individual is believed to possess (Wallis 1985, 129). HPM became what Elizabeth Puttick coins the “psychospiritual” part of the countercultural movement that began to grow in the 1960s in the US with inspiration from humanistic psychology. From its onset, HPM was an objection against established psychology, organized religion, philosophical and theological intellectualism, and what was considered destructive, scientific materialism (Puttick 2000). It is more difficult to distinguish New Age (NA) and HPM today, and some consider HPM to be a less spiritual branch of NA while others consider HPM and NA to be partially overlapping.

The two categories share many traits in content and organization. Structurally, HPM resembles NA because of their widespread eclecticism and loose structures. Members participate in many different contexts, and each individual selects and combines whatever makes sense to him or her. Some groups (e.g., Scientology) are organized as new religious movements that demand strong loyalty or maintain an orthodox belief or ritual system, and are found in the periphery of HPM (Stone 1976, 94). HPM is typically less spiritual than NA, but spirituality is also found in HPM, especially in the shape of Buddhist or Eastern influence. If a god appears in HPM, typically it is not a god in a common, Christian sense, but rather a form of cosmic energy, the person's true nature, or some shared life force (Stone 1976, 103).

#### **5. Self-Spirituality**

Heelas uses the expression “self-spirituality” as a reference to the shared paradigm or core ideology of NA. Self-spirituality encompasses three basic elements according to Heelas: an explanation of what is wrong with life and the world, a vision of the goal of perfection, and a set of methods to achieve it (Heelas 1996, 18ff). This section outlines these three elements and compares the spiritual self with two other perceptions of self that we find in today's society.

NA has inherited the explanation of what is wrong with society and humans from HPM: the problem is first and foremost improper socialization caused by a society that has ruined our authentic selves and induced in us guilt, fear, inhibitions, poor self-esteem, victim roles, unnecessary self-restrictions, and a wish to impress others. These external influences are often described as a person's ego, lower self, intellect, or consciousness (ibid).

Perfection or salvation is believed to be achievable by letting go of one's ego by which one supposedly is able to uncover one's authentic or higher self, and thus one's true spiritual nature. There are varying perceptions of the spiritual self within NA, but central to many of the other shared notions is the belief that it is connected to something greater than man, i.e., the divine, the eternal, or cosmos. This belief is reflected in the attitude towards authority, ethics, and responsibility.

NA has also inherited HPM's emphasis on personal experience. Personal experience is the only or highest authority in NA, because the spiritual self promises more direct access to true knowledge than handed-down religions, gurus, scientists, or experts can offer. This prioritization of authority is reflected in the practitioner's ethics where his or her "inner voice" or intuition is preferred to tradition and dogma. The spiritual self makes each individual fully responsible for his or her own life, because the relinquishment of the ego is presumed to also have freed the person from those external influences that the person might otherwise have blamed (e.g., childhood or society) for his or her shortcomings. In some NA segments this concept of personal responsibility is extended to include responsibility for the birth of one's parents or reality as such, but in a less radical form it may simply convey a sense of responsibility towards the world and one's fellow man, or the view that everyone is responsible for his or her own life and that interference with the lives of others will only impede their ability to relinquish their egos and find their true ways that only their spiritual selves can show them.

NA offers a large number of techniques for letting go of one's ego and realizing one's spiritual self or hidden potential. The breadth of methods and goals are characteristic of NA, but they may be arranged by applying Heelas' distinction (which he borrows from the study of new religious groups) between groups that are "world-rejecting," "harmonial," or "world-affirming." The first category applies to those segments of NA that are primarily occupied with letting go of the ego and realizing a spiritual self and spiritual reality. The second category is the largest one and includes those NA groups that seek to obtain the "best of both worlds," that is, to strike a balance between the spiritual and the material or corporeal. The last category, which will prove to be the most interesting one for this study, is the "prosperity wing" segment of NA. This segment of NA is the one that resembles HPM the most, and it is less concerned with letting go of the ego and more with realizing one's potential in one's professional life or realizing more materialistic goals (ibid).

There is a smooth transition between those ideas that are found in NA and those that are found in society in general. Heelas notes that in some cases NA simply states common tendencies in a more radical or spiritual form. Such similarities are also found in the perception of self. Heelas borrows Steven Hip-ton's distinction between the expressive self and the utilitaristic self: the utilitaristic individualist is focused on satisfying his or her own desires and interests, and to use his or her power, will, determination, initiative, ability to reason, etc. to maximize what the world may offer. The self is viewed as separate from family, religion, calling, authority, duty, moral exemplars, etc. The utilitaristic self serves as a foundation of several assumptions in society, such as the belief that there is something powerful in each individual that can be utilized and improved, enabling the person to increase his or her benefit from the material world. This utilitaristic self is most visible in NA's "prosperity wing," for example in the shape of self-help literature and techniques employing positive thinking as methods to achieve success and financial gains. This segment of NA is often found in a gray zone between the secular and the spiritual by associating psychological mechanisms (or something that resembles psychological mechanisms) with magical effects, for example by stipulating that positive thinking alone can alter physical reality.

The expressive self that is radicalized by NA to a spiritual self contrasts the utilitaristic self to some degree. The expressive individualist believes that there is more to life than the satisfaction of arbitrary

desires, in particular those desires that are stimulated by the capitalist emphasis on increase and materialistic consumerism. Instead, one attempts to identify and act out an authentic self. Materialistic goals are avoided as they are assumed to lead to greed, envy, and superficiality. Values are found inside of oneself, and one works on personal growth, meaningful relations, and the ability to be in touch with oneself (ibid, 160ff).

## 6. Primary Sources

The primary sources require a brief introduction, because their differences and forms are of interest to the analysis. The primary sources are LaVey's first three books: *The Satanic Bible* (1969), *The Compleat Witch* (1970), and *The Satanic Rituals* (1972). The later books, *The Devil's Notebook* (1992) and *Satan Speaks!* (1998) and various magazine articles and interviews have been omitted, as these sources either represent a much later period in LaVey's writing or have reached a much smaller audience<sup>1</sup>.

Of LaVey's three books, it is *The Satanic Bible* that had a major impact on modern Satanism. James Lewis describes *The Satanic Bible* as “a kind of *quasi-scripture* within the Satanic subculture” and “the single most influential document shaping the contemporary Satanic movement” (Lewis 2002). Both Lewis' and my own research indicates that it was LaVey's books, and in particular *The Satanic Bible*, that occupy a central position in modern Satanism both in terms of market dominance and status. In a survey that I conducted in 2002, only a single respondent did not indicate that he or she had read at least one of LaVey's books.<sup>2</sup> Both Lewis' and my own research also indicate that the respondents did not consider *The Satanic Bible* a “Bible in the Christian sense” and that most of them knew LaVey's writings and had formed an opinion of them by either supporting or repudiating them.

*The Satanic Bible* is divided into four sections. The first section is an anti-Christian diatribe that serves as a powerful attack on Christianity and Christian morals, proposing social Darwinism as an alternative. The second section is a compilation of a number of short texts that explain LaVey's attitude towards issues such as love and hate, sex, desire versus compulsion, the necessity of being able to say no, the black mass, etc. These texts refer to the so-called “Nine Satanic Statements,” which may be viewed as a condensed version of LaVey's philosophy (see Appendix 2). The last two sections of the book describe LaVey's view on magic and include practical instructions for rituals. The book has been in print since 1969 with varying prefaces, and has been published in several languages.

*The Satanic Rituals* is LaVey's second-most popular book in terms of number of readers within the Satanic subculture. The book includes a handful of rituals that are inspired by both known groups and religions, such as the Yezidi religion and freemasonry, and the fiction of H. P. Lovecraft. The rituals are an indistinct combination of borrowed scripture and the author's own writing, but in most cases the rituals are presented as authentic rituals founded in real traditions. This presentation is put in perspective in the introduction to the book, however, where LaVey states that the Satanist has access to all the mysteries of the world but as opposed to, e.g., Christians, the Satanist admits that they are fairy tales (LaVey 1972, 27).

*The Compleat Witch*, or *The Satanic Witch*, as it was later entitled, was published in 1970 and 1971, and then was not republished until 1989. The book describes the kind of everyday manipulation that LaVey terms “lesser magic” in *The Satanic Witch*. It is introduced as an extension of the workshops that LaVey conducted prior to the establishment of the Church of Satan and until around 1972. The book is aimed at female readers and explains how female attractiveness can be used to enchant and

1 A cautious estimate of the relative popularity can be gauged via the Internet bookstore Amazon.com's list of best selling books. On May 26, 2008, *The Satanic Bible* ranked no. 5,608, *The Satanic Witch* no. 19,979, and *The Satanic Rituals* no. 26,499. *The Devil's Notebook* ranked no. 43,230 and *Satan Speaks!* no. 93,323. *The Satanic Witch* has a higher sales rank than *The Satanic Rituals*; it is fair to explain this phenomenon by assuming that *The Satanic Witch* is read outside of the Satanic subculture.

2 This survey was conducted in 2001–2002 via the Internet and questionnaires that were included with the magazine “Satanisk Bulletin,” which is the only Danish magazine on Satanism. The 39 answers is limited statistical material, but since the number of Satanists in Denmark is usually estimated in the few hundreds, they can be expected to represent a large percentage of the Danish Satanists.

manipulate men. The book is based on the premises that females are almost entirely dependent on men, and that men can be manipulated by means of sexual attraction. The book is also a deliberately reactionary commentary on the female movement and the unisex movement of the 1960s and 1970s which according to LaVey are misogynist inventions. The book concludes with a bibliography with more than 170 entries covering genres such as psychology, anthropology, folklore, sociology, biology, etc., many of which deal with sexuality and body language. There are virtually no references or discussions of sources in the main text, however, leaving an impression that the bibliography serves to either pretend a scientific foundation, that is, to legitimize LaVey as a learned person, or to inspire further reading.

LaVey's books are easy to read as most of the contents are written in a clear and direct language, yet at the same time difficult to work with as many aspects are stated vaguely or ambiguously, some with tongue in cheek or in a deliberately occult or blasphemous language in order to appeal to the reader's fantasy or emotions. LaVey focuses on making the Satanic philosophy and rituals accessible so that each individual can use Satanism to obtain pleasure and success in his or her life, here and now. It is much more difficult to find clear explanations on how LaVey expects magic to work, what he believes happens after death, or where the divine or demonic fits into the equation. LaVey concludes his preface to *The Satanic Bible* with a statement that the reader will find fantasy and truth, and that both of these must be taken for what they are. Which is which is an open question that apparently LaVey leaves to the reader to answer.

## 7. LaVey's View of Humans

Recall that Heelas operates with three basic elements: an explanation of what is wrong with life and the world; a description of the goal of perfection; and methods to reach salvation. In the following subsections, I will show how these elements can be found in LaVey's writing, and I will attempt to map LaVey's perception of self to the spiritual, the expressive, and the utilitarian selves.

### 7.1 The Damaged Self

Keeping tradition with NA and HPM, LaVey identifies numerous defects and shortcomings in society that cause life and humans to function poorly.

LaVey describes his Satanism as a religion that opposes all other religions, considering Satanism the only religion that celebrates flesh and earthly life, and embraces the entire human being whether good or evil (LaVey 1969, 52). LaVey does not only oppose Christianity but also the spirituality of, e.g., Eastern religions or neopaganism is considered problematic; in particular the modern witchcraft movement is criticized intensely, indicating that LaVey considers it a contesting movement (ibid, 50ff, 84f. LaVey 1970, 12ff).

Most of LaVey's criticism against religion is aimed at Christianity, but he aims at its historical impact on the Western culture, as LaVey believes Christianity to be dying (LaVey 1969, 43ff. 1972, 33), leaving the contemporary new religious movements as a more present threat to mankind. When Christianity nonetheless receives the most of the blame for the troubles of mankind, it is both because of the Christian teachings and the Christian morals that LaVey believes have been institutionalized and still guide people even if they have liberated themselves from the dogma of the church. LaVey believes that Christianity has demonized human nature by defining natural instincts and emotions as sinful, trapping mankind in a perpetual state of feeling guilty that served to ensure the church its power and influence (LaVey 1969, 50ff, 82ff). This demonization and guilt-inducement causes a large number of impediments to human emotions, sexuality, self-esteem, interpersonal relations, chances of self-realization, health, etc. The Christian "Great Commandment" is reprehended for encouraging uncritical love towards both friends and foes. LaVey does not only consider this impossible and unnatural, but also highly damaging. To LaVey, both love and hate are strong, vital, and natural emotions, and only by recognizing and accepting both emotions can humans distinguish between them and use them constructively. Otherwise humans will lose the ability to love those that deserve it, and the suppressed

hate will lead to both mental and physical problems and diseases, or the suppressed hate may be directed at innocent people (LaVey 1969, 64f. 1989, 247f).

LaVey also strongly reprehends the attitude of the church towards sexuality, but also takes opportunity to criticize the attitudes towards sexuality of Eastern religions, society, counterculture, and psychology. LaVey believes that Christianity has made sexuality wrong and sinful, and although Western-world people in the 1960es may have intellectually accepted sex as natural and healthy, they still had feelings of guilt, especially towards masturbation and fetishes. LaVey advocates free sex but is not only critical against Christian norms; also the new sexual morals proposed by the counter-culture is criticized. LaVey considers all kinds of sex legal as long as the parties involved are adults and responsible people, and no-one is forced to act against his or her will. He also considers it important that others should not define what is natural or healthy sexuality, which he believes is the case in contemporary sexual liberation. LaVey does not limit healthy and liberated sexuality to intercourse between two or more partners, but also includes asexuality, sadism, masochism, fetishism, masturbation, homosexuality, transsexuality, etc. in his definition. This broad view of sexuality implies that the celibacy of the ascetic or the monk becomes sexually deviant, according to LaVey, because it is either asexuality or unacknowledged masochism (LaVey 1969, 84). He believes that it is necessary to deliberate oneself from feelings of sexual guilt, also unconsciously, because otherwise it will lead to neuroses and the passing of guilt to future generations (ibid, 66ff).

Relinquishing the ego and uncovering the authentic self are important themes in NA and HPM. The ego plays a similarly important role to LaVey, but he defines it differently. Some of the influences that LaVey wants to free the individual from, such as internalized morals, would be considered undesired functions of the ego in other groups within NA or HPM, and in that sense LaVey agrees with the notions of NA and HPM. However, with the exception of these unwanted influences, LaVey considers the ego to be unconditionally positive and associated with qualities such as pride, self-respect and self-realization, and he sees the possession of a healthy and strong ego as necessary to treat others well. To LaVey, the ego question is therefore not limited to the influence of the ego but also the attempts of Christianity and other religions to *suppress* the ego or, as is the case of Eastern religions, the attempts to *eliminate* it. LaVey describes Satanism as a religion that believes in total satisfaction of the ego and as the only religion that advocates intensification and encouragement of the ego (LaVey 1969, 94). Feelings such as envy, greed, etc., which are found among the seven deadly sins of the Catholic church, and which are seen as functions of the ego by NA and HPM, are also welcomed by LaVey, who sees these emotions as both natural, necessary, and generally human. In LaVeys interpretation, envy and greed become motivating for ambition (ibid, 46f), and egoism and self-respect become the necessary foundation for a vital life and for loving and respecting others. LaVey believes that the idea of dissolving the ego and rejecting material wealth was developed in areas where material success was difficult to obtain, and that faith could pacify people and make them satisfied with what little they had. LaVey considers this a commendable strategy from the powers that be, but outright stupid in a society of plenty (ibid, 92f). Satanists would never willingly choose self-denial according to LaVey, and as will be evident later in this paper, many of LaVey's techniques for deliberating and developing the individual are aimed at developing what LaVey considers a strong ego.

Another topic that is stressed in LaVey's books is the problematic interaction with other people. Edward J. Moody, who studied the Church of Satan during its early years, described its teaching as a kind of "magical therapy" that helped the members of the church overcome their social disabilities that caused them to fail in their relations with other people (Moody 2008). Solutions to relationship problems with other people require special techniques that may exceed conventional measures, according to LaVey. Poor human relations may come in the shape of a superior that treats one badly and cannot be told off; it may be a crush on someone that is not returned; it may be a threatening enemy or competitor; or it may be the "psychic vampire" that is draining energy and mental resources. In each of these examples, other people become obstacles that must be conquered via magic, manipulation, or otherwise prevented from taking advantage of oneself. Cooperation is found as the "modified golden rule," which is a tit-for-tat principle of treating others as they treat you. The human interaction in a



love relationships also seems to become a game to be won, and altruism is displayed as the Satanist's acts of kindness towards those that he or she appreciates because their happiness pleases the Satanist (LaVey 1969, 51).

LaVey's notion of sexuality, drives, the idea of suppressed feelings, the importance of the conscious and the subconscious, the possibility of developing neuroses, the realization of potential, etc. are clearly inspired by both the psychoanalytical and humanistic psychology. As mentioned earlier, *The Satanic Witch* includes a long list of books written by psychologists, and in a later official reading list for Satanists, LaVey mentions Freud, Jung, and Reich (Barton 1990, 163ff). The reason behind this significant interest in psychology appears to be part an acknowledgment of science as authoritative, and part a theory that psychological insight is required because of the human intelligence. LaVey describes humans as the only animal capable of lying to itself and believing the lie, which according to LaVey forces humans to constantly pursue self-awareness (LaVey 1972, 15). The evident inspiration from psychology is not a loving relationship, however. Arthur Lyons, who wrote about LaVey's philosophy in the beginning of the 1970es, described the Church of Satan as "anti-psychiatric" (Lyons 1970, 186), and in *The Satanic Rituals* LaVey refers to psychologist Thomas S. Szasz when he identifies Satanists with the role of the mentally ill as social critics or opposition to society (LaVey 1972, 16f). Szasz became associated with the anti-psychiatry movement in the US in the 1960'es and 1970'es, and was known for considering psychiatry a pseudo-scientific movement that used diagnostics of mental illnesses to control the population. Today the anti-psychiatric movement is remembered for its postulate that schizophrenia is the healthy reaction to a sick society, and Szasz' ideas have found their way into in Scientology. LaVey's critical towards psychiatry is much more moderate in his books and seems to be limited to those "hang-ups" of fetishes that part of psychology and NA considers problematic or to be signs of mental illnesses. LaVey instead considers them natural and more or less human as long as one is able to control one's desires, because according to LaVey it is exactly through liberation of emotions and drives that one avoids obsessive or self-destructive behavior (LaVey 1969, 81). LaVey does not wish to eliminate these "hang-ups," but instead wants to transform them to "hang-ons," that is, activities that supplement an individual's personality and contribute to the individual's satisfaction. The only problem, according to LaVey, is the shame that society attributes to the use of alcohol or fetishes, and the exercise is not about changing behavior but in not feeling shameful (Lyons 1970, 178). LaVey's criticism of established society and his view of human nature is thus based on LaVey's interpretation of contemporary psychology, but with emphasis on each person's own right to define what is best to him or her.

## 7.2 The Actualized Self

As was explained in the previous section, LaVey's considers the authentic self to be devoid of inhibitions and guilt, involving a strong and healthy ego. LaVey's concept of human nature and the special status that he attributes to children and non-human animals, as well as his notion of a successful life, provide an indication of his concept of the ideal human being.

The seventh statement of "The Nine Satanic Statements," LaVey's condensed explanation of Satanism, explains that:

*Satan represents man as just another animal, sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all-fours, who, because of his "divine spiritual and intellectual development," has become the most vicious animal of all!* (LaVey 1969, 25).

The notion that humans are animals like all others and thus can be understood on the same premises as other animals, combined with the assumption that our intellect introduces all kinds of problems, is fundamental to LaVey's view of humans. LaVey's understanding of the human animal is inspired by Darwin, among others, but it is the sociologist Herbert Spencer that applied Darwin's theory on human interactions and, ignoring Darwin's objections, created the social Darwinism hypothesis, who appears on the Church of Satan's reading list (Barton 1990, 163) and who may have influenced LaVey more than did Darwin. LaVey does not attribute any negative qualities to the carnal element that might somehow

oppose a spiritual self, but it is not the “Disneyesque” concept that is found on some NA circles. Humans *are* animals according to LaVey with all that implies, and as such is an integral part of nature. If humans are not always kind and gentle, but also driven by hate and aggression, then it is not because there is anything *wrong* with humans, or because humans are different from other animals; it is because humans live in a dangerous and brutal world. Hate and aggression are not wrong or undesired feelings but are necessary and advantageous for survival. This brutal interpretation of mankind and the world is emphasized in the first section of *The Satanic Bible*, where LaVey includes an edited excerpt of the book *Might Is Right*. This excerpt declares that: “Blessed are the strong, for they shall possess the earth—Cursed are the weak, for they shall inherit the yoke!” (LaVey 1969, 34). This excerpt was in part meant to provoke and challenge the reader (Redbeard 1996, 3ff) but it also reflects the social Darwinism and cynicism that LaVey gathered from people such as Herbert Spencer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Ayn Rand. LaVey's social Darwinistic leanings are also found in his understanding of the human evolution, which he believes is on its way to unseen heights: where children of the past were born to work in the fields and in the factories, today human quality has become more important than quantity, and in the future LaVey expects one child that can create to be more important than two that can manufacture, and more than fifty that can believe (LaVey 1972, 12). LaVey not only supports eugenics but also expects it to be a necessity in the future—not to produce a specific race or a specific look, but to create physically and mentally healthy and creative individuals. According to LaVey's daughter Zeena Schreck's preface to *The Satanic Witch*, the book is in part intended as a guide to eugenics or “selective breeding” (LaVey 1989, II), a subject that LaVey himself also discusses, and which seems to serve two goals: firstly, he encourages women to find partners that are their psychical and mental opposites because he considers the “attraction of opposites” to be a fundamental mechanism of nature to avoid inbreeding and promote healthy individuals (ibid, 62). Secondly, the book is largely a guide to finding the right husband, and according to LaVey, men and women come in varying quality. Rephrasing Crowley's statement that “everyone is a star,” LaVey agrees that anyone may be a star, but Crowley and others forget that stars come in different sizes (ibid, 192).

In addition to serving as a foundation for an understanding of human nature, children and animals represent an ideal that LaVey refers to as “the purest form of carnal existence” (LaVey 1969, 89) and as creatures that are sacred to Satanists which Satanists would never harm on purpose. Children and animals are described as “natural magicians” that Satanists may learn from, because children and animals do not deny their natural desires and drives and are thus better suited for the pursuit of their goals (LaVey 1969, 89, 122. 1979, 74). The special status attributed to children is also illustrated in the difference between adult and child baptisms: the adult symbolically casts off the falsehoods, hypocrisy and shame of the past, but the child is celebrated as a perfect being. The child baptism is only intended for children under four years of age, as older children are assumed to have been influenced by ideas that are alien to the Satanic philosophy (LaVey 1972, 205).

It is also within children and animals that LaVey finds values such as emotional spontaneity and authenticity, uninhibitedness, fantasy, superior senses, naturalness in terms of one's own needs, and the absence of socially induced neuroses, guilt, and shame. Many of these qualities are more difficult to find among adults than among children, because of man's “divine spiritual and intellectual development,” which according to LaVey has made humans “the most vicious animal of all” (LaVey 1969, 25). Nonetheless, LaVey appears to be somewhat undecided on his stance towards the intellect: our intellect may be the root of many of our problems, but our intellect is also the source of rationality and creativity that LaVey stresses in his deep respect for artists and scientists, and in his tribute to the children of the future that will create rather than produce or believe. In addition, rationality, logic and science are considered the Satanist's weapons against Christianity and other religions, and Satan is described as “the spirit of progress, the inspirer of all great movements that contribute to the development of civilization and the advancement of mankind” and is connected with qualities such as creativity and enlightenment (LaVey 1972, 77). In addition, intellect and creativity are highly present in the successful human being that—in departure from the philosophical ideal that is exemplified by children and animals—is the actual or realistic ideal that is used to measure people's success. LaVey declares in *The Satanic Bible* that the philosophy and techniques described in the book are the same as those applied

by the most self-realized and powerful people in the world, providing examples of financial experts, industrialists, popes, poets, dictators, opinion shapers, etc. (LaVey 1969, 104). This referral to earthly success as a measure of worth is repeated in several places, including *The Satanic Witch*, where the competent witch is identified by her ability to find the right husband, the better job, to avoid unwanted pregnancy, and in general to lead a competent life (LaVey 1989, 3) rather than by her “spiritual values.” As will be discussed in the next section, LaVey's religious techniques are aimed at attaining these and other mundane goals.

### 7.3 Liberating Magic

LaVey refers to his techniques for changing and improving people and their environments as magic and defines magic as “[t]he change in situations or events in accordance with one's will, which would, using normally accepted methods, be unchangeable” (LaVey 1969, 110). This leaves room for interpretation that is not narrowed by LaVey's explanation of magic as including a portion of applied psychology described in “magical terms,” combined with a rest that cannot (yet) be explained scientifically (ibid, 119). This description of magic makes it difficult to determine when LaVey believes to be supported by psychology, and when he believes to use magic in a more classical sense.

LaVey divides magic into “greater magic” and “lesser magic.” Lesser magic is LaVey's term for various types of manipulation such as body language, scents, looks, strategic flashing, etc., and it is mostly this kind of magic that is found in *The Satanic Witch*. The use of lesser magic in *The Satanic Witch* is derived from LaVey's “personality clock” (see Appendix 2), which is a model that divides humans into twelve different types of people. These types combine body shape with various personality traits; for example, the skinny “three-o'clock” is associated with abstract thinking and asocial behavior while the chubby “nine-o'clock” is associated with action rather than thinking and a sense of humor. The model is intended to aid the witch to identify the type of her quarry. Once identified, she may apply LaVey's principle of the “attraction of opposites” to spellbind the quarry by assuming the quarry's opposite role in terms of personality and physique. This “role play” may imply a change of weight, hair color, gait, voice, use of colors, name, etc. For example, if the quarry is a dominant person, the witch must be submissive, and if he is loud, she must be quiet. In addition to this use of the model where the goal is to find a partner or manipulate men by attraction to the witch, the personality clock has another function with respect to the personality of the witch herself: by finding her natural position on the clock dial, the witch is able to change her position or perfect it. LaVey believes that if the witch perfects her type so that hair, body shape, voice, scent, etc. harmonize, the witch will gain more interest and hence more success. According to LaVey, his personality typification is based on models created by the psychologists William Herbert Sheldon (b. 1898) and Ernst Kretschmer (b. 1888). LaVey appears to be aware that these models have been abandoned because of lacking scientific evidence but defends his model with references to personal experience and people that have applied the model successfully (LaVey 1989, 25f).

LaVey subdivides greater magic into rituals and ceremonies. He describes ceremonies as rites that are intended to celebrate or remember a particular event, an aspect of life, a role model, or to declare one's faith. Ceremonies thus concentrate on the existing, such as in the baptism rituals which differ from, e.g., Christian baptisms in that they are intended only as symbolic acts that are not expected to cause change. Rituals, on the other hand, are rites that are intended to cause change (LaVey 1972, 17). It is difficult to find any clarifications on how these changes are expected to occur, however. LaVey describes the rituals both as psychodramas in the psychological sense where the purpose to change the practitioner's own psyche, and as a way to change the outside world or other people. This change is assumed to be caused by bioelectric energy discharged through strong emotions such as blind hate or sexual orgasm (LaVey 1969, 88), or via deeply felt wishes, such as when a child strongly desires something (ibid, 122). Rituals are thus intended as tools that an individual may apply therapeutically against old problems and as a way to obtain future goals on both a psychical and a material level. An example of the former is found in LaVey's version of “The Black Mass,” which LaVey considers a psychodrama that is intended to free the practitioner from feelings of guilt and religious beliefs, or to

free the practitioner from unnecessary faith in contemporary dogma and values. The other type of ritual, which is directed at obtaining specific goals, is divided into three types by LaVey, who bases them on feelings of lust, hate, or compassion. In each type the rituals are used to focus emotion and energy on the desired goal, and in addition to enabling the possibility that the ritual may have the desired effect, the ritual is also expected to make the practitioner function better afterwards because the pent-up emotions have been released. That is, if a hate ritual does not kill the victim, at least the Satanist's aggressions have been released, and the Satanist can get on with his or her life.

LaVey's rituals are somewhat difficult to analyze as rituals in a classical sense. LaVey himself sees many similarities between his own rites (and perhaps in particular the ceremonies) and modern theatrical plays, and he also feels a need to distinguish them from contemporary encounter groups.<sup>3</sup> LaVey believed that Satanism fills an important void between psychology and religion, because psychology did not meet the human need for rituals and dogma (LaVey 1969, 52f). In the context of this goal and the desired function of the rituals, LaVey's rituals are perhaps better understood as therapeutic techniques than as classic, religious rituals. This view is supported by the role that LaVey ascribes to magic in practice: magic may be a powerful tool, but LaVey stresses that success is not achieved by positive thinking alone; a combination of positive thoughts and positive action is required (*ibid*, 41). In addition, LaVey introduces the term "the balance factor" as an ability to set realistic goals, as a key element in magic (*ibid*, 127ff). An unknown and regular person should not expect even the most powerful magic to suffice to attract a popular actress, and magic is not expected to help a person gain success if the person does not already have tangible talents.

#### 7.4 The Satanic Self

The spiritual self, where the spiritual or divine has fused with the self, is a central theme in self-spirituality. In LaVey's Satanism the relationship between self and divinity is not trivial, however. To begin with, LaVey appears to be using several different concepts of the divine and its relationship to life without attempting to unify them. The divine is thus described both as nonexistent, as a kind of force in nature, as a symbol, and as a person's own ego. Furthermore, the rituals provide ample opportunity for a theistic view of Satan and other beings. This wide array of options has later been narrowed by LaVey and the Church of Satan after the theistic Temple of Set broke off from the Church of Satan in 1975 and the Church of Satan felt compelled to clarify that it is founded on atheism. Beyond this clarification, the Church of Satan has encouraged its members to find each their own concept of Satan, and today there are many different interpretations of Satan among Satanists that have been inspired by LaVey (Lewis 2001:8f).

LaVey rejects the existence of all gods by default. To LaVey, gods are an externalization of the human ego which was created because humans would not acknowledge their egos and instead placed their forbidden wishes in the hands of their gods. The gods are thus created in man's image rather than vice versa, and by worshipping the gods of the existing religions, according to LaVey one worships those people that externalized the ego and created the god (LaVey 1969, 44f). In the same vein, LaVey interprets religious concepts involving the killing of a god as an expression of self-hate (*ibid*, 89). LaVey believes that dogma and rituals are necessary for humans, and LaVey instead proposes that we create gods according to our own emotional needs, or promote ourselves to gods, so that the worship of gods becomes ego-affirming rather than ego-suppressing. He believes that the externalized gods thus become internalized, and that humans will realize that there never was a difference between the spiritual and the physical worlds, which had at all times been physical only (*ibid* 44f, 96). The concept of the spiritual existing as something independently of the body is thus rejected, and the role as god does not imply any divine characteristics, except the right to define good and evil, and as the state of each person being the most important person to himself or herself—the importance of which is shown by selecting the Satanist's birthday as the most important holiday (*ibid*, 96). LaVey's Satanism can thus be considered a pure veneration of the ego where gods are not united with the ego but rather replaced by it. At the same time, it is Satan (and other demonic entities) that are addressed in the actual rituals, and

3 Encounter groups is a form of group therapy that was developed by the humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers.

it is Satan that is associated with a set of values and qualities in “The Nine Satanic Statements” that LaVey considers material to Satanism. As such, the rituals can be seen both as a celebration of the person's ego and the Satanic values, and as a celebration of an *idealized* self.

Other concepts indicate theistic leanings: the gods are rejected as an externalization of the human ego, but LaVey states that it is wrong to believe that Satanists do not believe in god. Instead, Satanists believe in god as a dark force that permeates and balances nature, and which can neither be explained nor used by religion or science, and which is too impersonal to care about life on Earth (ibid, 40, 62). This dark (presumably meaning “unknown”) force appears to be connected with Satan, but it does not appear to play an independent role, perhaps because the divine is defined as something that has no practical implications for the earthly life that occupies LaVey. LaVey's Satanism thus includes a variety of characteristics that indicate spiritual leanings, but in practice it is the material and utilitarian facets that dominate.

## 8. Summary

LaVey believes that his Satanism distinguishes itself from other religions by focusing on the physical instead of the spiritual. In contrast to NA, LaVey does not consider humans as spiritual beings or as possessing a duality between body and soul, but as an animal, for better or for worse. LaVey's understanding of the divine is open to a wide array of possible interpretations, however, which harmonize with those interpretations that are found in the less spiritual segments of NA and HPM, where the divine is seen as a person's true self, cosmic energy, or other forms of immanent perceptions of the divine.

Children and animals occupy a special place in Satanism because of their unspoiled nature while LaVey, similarly to NA, considers the adult person's intellect to be problematic. In spite of the intellect's ability to lead humans astray from its carnal nature, it is the same intellect that LaVey cherishes when he stresses man's rationality and creativity, and unlike NA, LaVey sees indulgence, material success, and power as the highest goals.

Unlike NA and HPM in general, LaVey does not consider Eastern spirituality a viable alternative to the established religions, and is generally highly critical towards other religious and spiritual groups and techniques. He explains his own use of religious techniques instead of psychological methods in his solution by arguing that these techniques are used consciously, because humans *need* rituals and dogma, and that psychology does not meet this demand. LaVey's use of magic can thus be seen as therapeutic rather than religious; however, this view is refuted when LaVey attempts to borrow scientific authority for the magical processes; for example, by including theories about bioelectrical energy to explain how magic works. The tendency to attribute a magical effect to mechanisms that presumably are psychological is a characteristic of the segment of self-spirituality that Heelas terms “the prosperity wing.” LaVey's Satanism fits into this segment in particular because the goal of magic is non-spiritual, and instead seeks to liberate the practitioners from their inhibitions to develop their potential and thus obtain their goals of power and influence.

LaVey shares NA's and HPM's view of humans as inhibited and damaged by external and internalized moral concepts that have been induced by culture and established religions. LaVey's view of the ego is uncharacteristic of NA and HPM, however, part of the reason being that LaVey has a different concept of the nature of the ego. LaVey wishes to liberate humans from their inhibitions, but it is not the ego as such that poses a problem, as he finds it necessary to maintain a strong and healthy ego. LaVey's solution is not to let go of the ego, but rather to repair the damages done to it. This view lies closer to the HPM concept of the authentic self than the NA notion of the spiritual self, even if LaVey's social Darwinistic definition of the authentic self is less peaceful than imagined by the humanistic psychologists.

LaVey primarily distinguishes himself from the general traits of NA and HPM through his use of science to legitimize his views. This appeal to scientific authority appears to be an non-binding, ideological argument, however, as he often favors personal experience and preference. Examples of this can be

found in terms of sexual preferences, or in his weighing of personal experience when magic conflicts with scientific facts. He thus shares his use of personal experience as the higher authority against scientific facts with HPM and NA, and his use of obsolete or controversial science as authority is also commonly found in NA.

My analysis indicates that although LaVey's Satanism is clearly consistent with general characteristics of world-affirming HPM and self-spirituality NA, the Devil's in the details in terms of some significant differences. Most importantly, LaVey's Satanism is largely materialistic and anti-spiritual, and embraces the ego rather than attempts to suppress it.

## 9. Recategorization as the Prosperity Wing

I introduced my analysis by asking the question: “How does Anton LaVey describe human nature; and how does this description harmonize with general tendencies within the Human Potential Movement and Heelas' term, self-spirituality?” Both NA and HPM are terms that are applied to a variety of different groups, activities, techniques, etc. that share certain similarities. One should expect to find both similarities and differences when compared with Anton LaVey's Satanism, and this proved to be the case.

It is meaningful to categorize LaVey's early Satanism as a self-spirituality group based on the general differences and similarities between LaVey's Satanism and NA and HPM. However, it seems relevant and important to further categorize LaVey's Satanism as “the prosperity wing,” as this placement explains many of the differences between LaVey's Satanism and the general characteristics of self-spirituality. It is also meaningful to categorize LaVey's Satanism as HPM, but since HPM largely overlaps with the less spiritual segment of self-spirituality where the prosperity wing is also found, the categorization as a part of the HPM in addition to the prosperity wing does not offer enough additional insights into LaVey's Satanism to warrant a dual categorization.

LaVey's Satanism has traditionally been grouped with modern witchcraft and occultism. However, the meaningful categorization as part of “the prosperity wing” indicates that comparisons with related groups may rather be found in the self-help literature and groups that focus on improving human interaction and psychological techniques aimed at meeting material goals. A more thorough examination of LaVey's Satanism would encompass additional elements of his world-view, and would take into account the development of LaVey's writing since the early Church of Satan to the period where LaVey witnessed the decentralization of Satanism, changes in the religious landscape, and the failing disappearance of Christianity that he predicted in *The Satanic Rituals*.

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(\*) These books do not include information on the publication year. However, the edition of *The Satanic Bible* quoted in this article includes a preface by Burton H. Wolfe that is dated December 1976 whereas the original 1969 edition had a different preface.



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## Appendix 2: The Nine Satanic Statements

1. Satan represents indulgence, instead of abstinence!
2. Satan represents vital existence, instead of spiritual pipe dreams!
3. Satan represents undefiled wisdom, instead of hypocritical self-deceit!
4. Satan represents kindness to those who deserve it, instead of love wasted on ingrates!
5. Satan represents vengeance, instead of turning the other cheek!
6. Satan represents responsibility to the responsible, instead of concern for psychic vampires!
7. Satan represents man as just another animal, sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all-fours, who, because of his “divine spiritual and intellectual development,” has become the most vicious animal of all!
8. Satan represents all of the so-called sins, as they all lead to physical, mental, or emotional gratification!
9. Satan has been the best friend the church has ever had, because he has kept it in business all these years!

## Appendix 3: The LaVey Personality Synthesizer

